

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRIDGE 00578 281749Z
ACTION ARA-14

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R 281656Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4814
INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

UNCLAS BRIDGETOWN 0578

E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: EAGR, ELAB, PGOV, BB

SUBJ: BARBADOS SUGAR HARVEST BEGINS AFTER WAGE SETTLEMENT

1. APPROXIMATELY 7000 SUGAR WORKERS BEGAN THE 1978 HARVEST ON FEBRUARY 27, ONE DAY AFTER THE BARBADOS GOVERNMENT BROUGHT THE BARBADOS WORKERS UNION (BWU) AND THE SUGAR PRODUCERS FEDERATION (SPF) TOGETHER IN A THREE-HOUR MEETING THAT SETTLED ON NEW WAGE RATES FOR THE WORKERS. THE BWU AND SPF HAD BEEN DEAD-LOCKED IN THEIR BIYEARLY PERIOD OF DISAGREEMENT ON WAGE INCREASES FOR THE SUGAR WORKERS SINCE LATE JANUARY.

2. THE BWU AND SPF AGREED THAT IN-SEASON WAGES FOR 1978-79 WOULD BE 15 PERCENT HIGHER THAN THOSE FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS AND THAT OUT-OF-CROP WAGES WOULD BE 20 PERCENT HIGHER. THE NEW WAGES WILL BE RETROACTIVE TO JANUARY 1.

3. BWU GENERAL SECRETARY FRANK WALCOTT TOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER THE SETTLEMENT THAT THE DELAY IN REACHING AGREEMENT WAS TO ENSURE THE BEST POSSIBLE TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR THE
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SUGAR WORKERS. PRIMIN AND MINISTER OF FINANCE TOM ADAMS TOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE PRESENTED LIVE ON LOCAL TELEVISION FEBRUARY 27 THAT THE INCREASES WOULD NOT UPSET THE GOB'S PLAN TO HOLD WAGE INCREASES DOWN TO FIVE PERCENT. ADAMS SAID THE SUGAR WORKERS WERE AMONG THE LOWEST PAID WORKERS IN BARBADOS, THAT THEY HAD NOT HAD A WAGE INCREASE SINCE THE 1975 AGREEMENT WITH

THE SPF AND THAT THREE YEARS TIMES FIVE PER CENT EQUALS
15 PERCENT. THE PRIME MINISTER DISAGREED WITH NEWSMEN WHO
PREDICTED EITHER AN INCREASE IN THE PRICE OF SUGAR IN
BARBADOS OR THE CLOSING OF SOME OF THE MORE MARGINAL
SUGAR PLANTATIONS.

4. ORIGINAL GOB ESTIMATES OF A SUGAR CROP OF 120,000 TONS
HAVE NOW BEEN REVISED DOWNWARD TO FROM 105,000 TO 108,000 TONS.
POOR RAINFALL, SOME CANE FIRES AND THE DELAY IN
BEGINNING THE HARVEST BECAUSE OF THE WAGE DISPUTE ARE
AMONG THE FACTORS INVOLVED.
EDDY

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